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SECTION A



A B S T R A C T

**A spotlight on
some of the strong
female leadership
in the Greenbelt area**

Kooistra finds fit at Alden Elementary

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JUSTIN ITES ites@iafalls.com

To lead a successful building, a school principal must have the ability to connect with a variety of people. Those groups include fellow administrators, teachers and students.

Alden Elementary Principal Jacki Kooistra believes the culture she inherited a few years ago has enabled her to keep the school moving in the right direction.

While she initially saw herself serving in an assistant principal role, the opportunity in Alden was too good to pass up.

"It can be quite shocking to step out of the classroom to manage an entire building. But Alden was been a nice fit because it was similar to the building size I had in a year as a class. I felt more confident and knew about the community from a few friends I have in Iowa Falls," Kooistra said.

Originally from LeMars, Kooistra said there were moments growing up where she started to take a keen interest in teaching. One day, her older sister brought home a class book that included other students' writing. She recalls taking those papers and grading them as if she were already a teacher.

During her third grade year, Kooistra said her class received new math textbooks, so they were



LeMars native Jacki Kooistra was hired as the building principal at Alden Elementary a few years ago. She was aware at a young age that education was going to be an area of interest for her.

THE RIGHT LEADERSHIP

able to take the older ones home. She would create fake assignments and grade them.

"I feel like early on, it was ingrained in me but solidified in high school by having advocates who supported me and helped me become the person I am. My high school cross country coach was also my freshman year science teacher and she was a pivotal person in my world as well as my high school calculus and Span-

ish teacher," Kooistra said. "All of them saw potential in me, but they did not make my life easy but rather challenged me to stretch myself."

Following her high school graduation, Kooistra attended Mount Marty University in Yankton, S.D. She spent one semester there, but realized the campus was too small. That led her to the University of Sioux Falls.

Her experience there was unique in that she

transferred during the month of January, and was immediately placed in a classroom.

"They had a J-term and they put education majors in the classroom immediately because the typical practicums didn't start until junior year in college. They didn't want people backing out and realizing it wasn't for them. I was in a seventh grade math class my very first day on campus. It was a unique experience because I was already planning and creating lessons," Kooistra said.

Her first post-college job was teaching high school science at a

7-12 alternative school in Sioux Falls - East Dakota Educational Cooperative - which has since changed its name. At 22 years of age, she was working with students only four years younger than her. Those students were typically unsuccessful within their home environments.

Kooistra was there for three years before she moved on to another teaching job for the Sioux Falls School District. While there, she taught math and science.

Eventually, she accepted a job with the Nevada School District, where she stayed for five years prior to accepting the Alden

Elementary principal position.

The Nevada School District provided Kooistra with many opportunities in leadership roles. She was part of the TLC (Teacher Leadership Compensation) program, and was an instructional coach. That role afforded her the opportunity to teach all day, but also assist fellow staff members with instructional teaching strategies. She also observed classes and provided feedback. Looking back, Kooistra admits that all of those roles helped prepare her for her principal job.

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to professional development and bring back what I learned to present to the staff within the building. All those things definitely gave me a leadership role that was a stepping stone to be an administrator," Kooistra said.

Finding the right fit

She will always remember her first year leading the Alden Elementary staff. The arrival of COVID provided several new challenges for staff and students during the 2020-21 school year. With those added distractions, Kooistra said her first goal was to get to know the ins and outs of the building and staff - a similar activity she used to do when she was in the classroom as a teacher and wanted to get to know her students.

During her first weeks on the job, Kooistra set up one-on-one sessions with each staff member where she allowed them to tell her what they liked and didn't like about what was happening at Alden Elementary.

"I spent a lot of my first year here listening because I didn't want to come in with all new ideas and change anything until I knew how the building functioned," Kooistra said.

Her first impression of the school and community was positive, and Kooistra explained that it was easy to see why the district had a strong culture in place.

"The staff here is great and I noticed right away that our teachers have so many positive conversations with their students. You see students setting up tunnels to greet other students who enter the building. Then you step back and realize that this building used to house a K-12 school," Kooistra said. "That provides its own advantages due to extra space. We've got two art rooms, a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) room and more available."

The current Alden Elementary roster size is roughly 165 students, and class size can be a dis-



Alden Elementary Principal Jacki Kooistra believes strong collaboration with her staff is a key to building a strong culture. She is pictured with staff member Katy Jensen.



Visiting classrooms and making connections with students is all part of the process for Alden Elementary Principal Jacki Kooistra. She said the school benefits from smaller class sizes.

tinct advantage over larger schools. There's also the personal connections that many staff members have with the parents of the children they teach. In a small town, everyone seems to know everybody's name. That's no

different in Alden.

Kooistra said the student to staff ratio is advantageous and student data reflects that the staff is realizing the full potential of smaller class sizes.

The LeMars native said being employed in a

'power position' such as a school principal is becoming more and more common for females. She doesn't take it for granted, but is hopeful that one day people are judged on their ability to do the job at a high level, rather

than if they are male or female.

One prideful aspect of

her role is that it can be a teaching moment or example for her own kids.

"I have pride from the girl standpoint of being able to show my own daughters that you can lead a whole school and model characteristics. We've grown as a society that it's becoming the norm to have females in these positions," Kooistra said. "Growing up, females were typically teachers and administration were mainly men. I think we are making more shifts in that regard, which is good because we all have different ways and approaches to doing a good job whether you are male or female. I won't say if a male or female is better because I believe fit is the most important. I might be terrible and not as effective at other school because it is just not a good fit for me and a school district."

As she moves onward in her current role, Kooistra hopes to effectively continue to have rich conversations with her staff on how to support students and help them grow as individuals as much as they do in the classroom. She said collaboration will always be a hallmark of her leadership and what she wants to accomplish.

"The reality is that education has not changed a lot in last 100 years. I hear these conversations of how we need to prepare these kids for a world that doesn't exist yet. I feel that that reality hit home during COVID and how we had to shut down and seeing the impact that had on our kids," Kooistra said. "I think we are going to have to start making bigger shifts than what we are making." ■

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Primus offers what her customers want and ask

PHOTOS AND STORY BY ELAINE LORING
eloring@iafalls.com

Rosanne Primus' store Backwoods Gallery, 1282 Edgington Ave. has been a mainstay in Eldora for more than 20 years, but Primus' experience in retail reaches a little further than that.

"I got my sales tax license in 1997 and did craft shows for a year," she began. "Then I rented a building from Fred Leonard for a couple years... and then we bought this building in November of 1999."

The name Backwoods Gallery was decided when, "my husband and I came up with it just driving around the country roads and throwing stuff out... and that's what stuck," she laughed.

Primus owns 51 percent of the business, and her husband Don owns the other 49, but she's the one who runs the show, and the decisions are hers to make.

Backwoods Gallery is unique in a lot of ways, especially because of the vendors Primus uses. "We don't have as many consigners as we used to, but we do have probably half a dozen that make or bring in stuff, from sewing, to vintage for resale."

She also uses her "official metal guy" who consigns items, as well, and someone else who handles the baby clothing and gifts. "We added the baby section maybe a year and a half ago," she said. "It's growing and we keep adding more, as people ask for things."

Primus listens to what her customers want, and the store has evolved with what they ask for, she said. Trends change regularly, too. "It started with a lot of handmade products, and it kind of phased out of that for a while, and now it's back."

She said people want the smaller, locally-made items, and she thinks the pandemic helped with that. "People were home, and when they couldn't get the products they ordered on line, they could find it here... and that helped us."

Backwoods Gallery caters to be local and out of town shoppers who may be camping at Pine Lake, or visiting friends and family, and they always



Rosanne Primus owns Backwoods Gallery in Eldora where she offers candles and bath products, food items and wine, a baby section, as well as a large selection of new and re-purposed consigned and hand-made goods.

EVER EVOLVING

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From left: Claire, Maegan, Heather, Chelsae, Caitlan, Annie. Not pictured: Steph, Amy, Emily, Heather

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Upstairs at Backwoods Gallery is a large wine section where owner Rosanne Primus offers boutique wines that may not be found on grocery store shelves. She sells wines from all over the world.

are more tourism related – either Iowa or Eldora based,” she said. “We can also do custom stuff for people, and we have.”

She sells her candles, T-shirts and pillows to other stores around the state. “We’ve made candles for a long time,” she said. Primus makes her candles, as well as her bath products, out of soy. Area FFA kids sell them as fundraisers every year, and they put their label on it. “We do some wholesale, too,” she said

Upstairs is a large selection of smaller boutique wines that might not be found in a grocery store. She originally started just selling wine from Eagle City, a Hardin County winery which has since closed, then she started offering more. “We sell wine from all over the world now.”

Primus doesn’t know what the future may bring, “I’ve been told I can never retire,” she laughed. “But I get these ideas, and they just burn a hole in your head, and I have to figure out how to make it work.”

The memorial section is a newer addition to the store, and that has been growing as well. She also has one of the few photo machines around, where customers can print pictures off their phone starting at 39 cents for a 4x6 print.

Primus continues to focus on the ever-changing trends and tries to offer items people want. “We didn’t see ourselves selling as many foods 20 or so years ago. It just evolves. We try stuff and sometimes it doesn’t do that great, or it does great for a while then fads change... and styles change.”

Rosanne Primus listens to her customers who come to Backwoods Gallery in Eldora time and time again, to find unique, re-purposed, hand-crafted, seasonal, vintage or one-of-a-kind items.



She also does a lot of seasonal items and a lot of re-purposed furniture. Downstairs is the Salvage Center, which is open during the warmer months, Easter through Labor Day, and is full of antique, vintage, and re-purposed items.

In the meantime, the newest trend she is seeing is a little bit farm-related, but more towards “the Yellowstone effect,” from the television series “Yellowstone.”

“It’s a lot of textures like cozy wood and leath-

er... the animal prints and hides, and the saddle blanket style,” she said, and her store has several items right along those lines. “We just go with what people are asking for and hope we’re right,” she laughed.

And does she like being the boss? “Well, I haven’t been fired yet... but I really do enjoy it.”

Backwoods Gallery is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays. They are closed Sundays. ■

make sure to stop in. She said people like unique items like handmade soaps and candles, and the metal pieces, which are usually one of a kind, “they just like the unique and hand-crafted,” she said.

In addition, Primus also sells candy, sauces, dips, teas and jelly. “We try to get things as locally as we can,” she said. “With food and stuff being expensive, people are giv-

ing it more, and food just makes a good gift.”

People can come in and customize their own food or gift baskets, and Primus sells different sizes of baskets so people can build their own. “We provide the basket, and they can put whatever they want in there. We make it look pretty. We’re also working on getting some meat and cheese baskets.”

The new basket of-

ferings will be pre-made and include cheese, summer sausage, crackers, and wine. “It’s something we’re working on for Christmas and we’ll do several different options that people can choose from.”

In addition to all that, Primus also can screen print images on T-shirts or pillows, which she sells many of, especially her zip code pillows. “They

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Kinsinger embraces different roles

STORY AND PHOTOS BY COREY MEINTS
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Sunday school teacher. Leader of 4-H. Coach. Mother. Business owner. Life saver. All of these things and more fill Melanie Kinsinger's resume.

Kinsinger, 42, is currently the co-owner of KTM Transport with her husband Todd, as well as the EMS Director and a firefighter with the Buckeye Fire Department.

A native of Buckeye, Kinsinger said she has spent her life running around the small town southwest of Iowa Falls. It was only natural that she become a part of the community fabric, she added.

"My dad's shop was just outside of town and I'd run in to town on my bike I kept in the back of his truck and run around town until the five o'clock whistle told me it was time to go back to the shop," Kinsinger said. "There were maybe four kids and we'd just run around. We'd go to the old people's houses and have cookies. Literally, it was four hours every day where Dad had no idea where I was."

That kind of familiarity with the town and its people that led her to become involved in the fire department. She said she always felt she was the kind of person who was willing to help make others feel better.

With KTM Transport,



Melanie Kinsinger was destined to serve Buckeye. After running the streets there for years, she is the EMS Director for the Buckeye Fire Department.

LEADER OF LIVES

Kinsinger said she is basically the office manager. She also does the books for her dad, who helped her and Todd get started in the trucking business. KTM hauls aggregate for roads. In the winter, they haul empty seed boxes preparing for spring planting.

"We met in 2000, and started talking in 2001," Kinsinger said. "He was an over-the-road trucker. His uncle actually drove truck for my dad and my uncle for years. I was running the bar and grill here and he came in one day and told me to give him my number and maybe we'd chat."

In May of that year,

he came in and told me he quit his job and was moving back to Iowa.

"I thought, 'Great! I made this boy quit his job,'" Kinsinger said. "He said he'd find a job doing something in trucking. It was close to Memorial Day and my folks asked me if I had any friends coming. I said well, a friend that I'm talking to, but don't like him because I'm not sure that I do yet."

The Memorial Day gathering resulted in her dad offering her future husband a job. Ultimately, that led to KTM Transport in 2006 with her father. A decade later, they bought the business from

her dad.

"He came to work for my dad and uncle in May 2001 and we worked side-by-side since," Kinsinger said. "We just celebrated our 20th anniversary in September."

KTM has six employees, nine with office help and mechanics.

"I pretty much oversee the day-to-day operation while Todd and I work together coordinating the days," Kinsinger said. "One day he's busy and I'm not, the next I am and he's not. It depends on what's going on, but it takes constant communication."

Since she's the bookkeeper, she never gets to

drive the big rigs. But she almost has on a few occasions.

"I've threatened him that I would," Kinsinger said. "When he thinks bookkeeping is so easy, I tell him we'll switch roles. He said I'd have to find somebody other than him to teach me how to, though. We've got some great employees who said they'd help me, so I've threatened."

Kinsinger added being a small family business, employees are family.

"They are what makes our business and we appreciate and value them every day," Kinsinger said. "It doesn't always get said often enough."

Well before she became a business owner, Kinsinger started down a path that has led her to become the EMT Director at the Buckeye Fire Department. She took EMR and Firefighter-1 training in 2000. Going back to her days running around town led to that, she noted.

"I went into it with a mindset that I'm sociable, I can comfort people, I babysat since I was 11, I thought it would be perfect," Kinsinger said. "I thought I'd be the report writer and hold the hands of people who's loved ones are going through something. It just took off from there."

Kinsinger said she loves it and has a real passion for it. Enough where she can't see herself leaving until she is no longer able to answer a call.

Buckeye Fire Department offers fire and EMS services as a non-transporter first responder service. Kinsinger said she has entertained the idea of upgrading her training from EMR (emergency responder) to include advanced EMT or even paramedic. She has even looked at courses that would lead her to be a registered nurse.

"That has intrigued me because, in Iowa, I can run as an RN on an ALS (advanced life support) service so I can roll as a paramedic," Kinsinger said. "the thing a lot of RNs lack is the emergency services response. I've been doing it for 21 years, so I have that to bring to the table."

While her husband is a lieutenant with the Buckeye Fire Department, Kinsinger is a test away from becoming a Firefighter-2. While there is nothing she can't do as a Firefighter-1, the next level means more training.

"It's a little more intense," Kinsinger said. "You can do the same thing, there's just more in-depth knowledge. Iowa requires firefighter-1 to be on a department. I got to a point where I was sufficient in knowledge to be an asset. But being a mother and my husband



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Melanie Kinsinger has been with the Buckeye Fire Department as an EMT and firefighter for over 20 years. Now the EMS director for the department, she said her goal is to see it grow until she is no longer able to serve.



Melanie Kinsinger is both the EMS Director and a firefighter with the Buckeye Fire Department. She is also a business owner, running KTM Transport with husband Todd. Over the years she has led 4-H, coached youth volleyball and softball. She credits those around her with helping her get where she's at.



also on the department, we had to make that decision who was going to do what. We're not both going to go into a structure fire because we have a child."

Kinsinger said that the firefighter side is more her husband's passion. She's still involved at fires. In fact, she's gained a reputation within the department for her command of calls.

"I'm kind of known as a dictator on scene with rehab," Kinsinger said. "Rehab when we're on scene an extended period of time, we want to check the guys out and ensure the safety of our firefighters. So stop and check their vitals and make sure they're doing good. These guys are stubborn with that, I get it. I understand their passion. When they see me coming, they're 'Great, it's Melanie.' But there's a time when they have to take a step back. The department is family and we have to take care of them."

As the EMS Director, Kinsinger is in charge of making sure that the monthly rig checks are done, certifications are kept up, CPR classes are scheduled, reports are sent to the state, keeping supplies are up to date. When she started, she never thought she'd elevate to a leadership role.

"I thought I'd just be the paper writer and hand holder," Kinsinger said. "Now I've got a great crew with two EMTs, three first responders and around 16 firefighters that are great to work with. That's why I'm where I'm at now."

Kinsinger said the idea of work and the fire department being family is the same idea she grew up with in Buckeye. It's the same idea that makes her job hard.

"The hardest thing is responding to house of someone you know, and around here that's almost everybody," Kinsinger said. "It's kid of a standing joke that 10-1 Melanie is going to know the patient. That has its advantages, but it also has its definite disadvantages. It's somebody you know,

somebody you have a relationship with, or it's somebody with whom you have a mutual acquaintance. The advantage it gives me hopefully gives the patient some ease of mind knowing and seeing somebody familiar. But there's some tough calls."

She said when those tough calls come, she feels part of her job is to make sure her crew is okay. That can happen with a simple question and then listening.

"You would hope within this line of volunteerism that people would be able to communicate, but each situation is different," Kinsinger said. "I just found you have to talk about it. If it's bugging you, talk it out. I am fortunate that I am able to move on and go to the next one. That's not for everybody."

Kinsinger said she and Todd rarely bring anything home. Sometimes it does, though.

"We rarely bring it back," Kinsinger said. "He checks up on me when I have a call he didn't need to respond to make sure I'm okay. I pretty much wear my heart on my sleeve, so people know. I've learned to take care of today because you don't know what tomorrow will be. As a mom, a business owner, and EMT I have to take care of it now or make a game plan."

While it's pretty clear what she gets out of owning a company – her livelihood – Kinsinger said she gets so much more out of being the EMS Director at the Buckeye Fire Department. A position that certainly doesn't pay the family bills.

"There's nothing more I get than seeing someone else succeed, whether that's at work, here at the department, or coaching or any of those other things," Kinsinger said. "I get my gratification from that. I just have a passion for helping people. And my successes only come from those I work with." ■

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McDonald operates Small Town Girl Boutique

PHOTOS AND STORY BY SHAWN DIGITY sdigity@iafalls.com

Laci McDonald, the owner of Iowa Falls' Small Town Girl Boutique, has been in her brick-and-mortar location now for over a year selling a wide range of clothing and jewelry. And she stated that she's been nothing short of busy in that time; there's been no dearth of visitors waltzing in through the front door.

What was initially intended to kick-start as an online brand in July 2019, McDonald had to pivot when met with the looming pandemic about six months later. So while her boutique bout technically began three years ago, in a barely pre-COVID era, the storefront has only been in the picture since July 2021.

It first started at home, with live sales, pickups, and even deliveries headquartered at her abode, so there was a humble beginning aspect to her story. However, for the new business owner, there wasn't much time for a slow-and-steady start as COVID-19 arrived the following winter. McDonald was able to secure a few months' worth of momentum, but she, too, felt the shockwaves of the pandemic just that quickly into the endeavor: "I feel like I had just gotten the ball rolling when COVID hit.

"I was about six



Laci McDonald, with her shop chock full of Halloween offerings, has "Hocus Pocus" on the boutique window and some spooky witticism on her seasonal apparel — like with her "Ghost Malone" T-shirts.

THE RIGHT FIT

months in... That was definitely an obstacle with manufacturers and companies I purchased from and supplies and shipping. It kind of affected all of that. I was new to all of it."

She used those precious early months to get

some experience for Small Town Girl before the pandemic's tumult started affecting operations, but the situation still required some adaptation. "So when COVID was happening, and I was doing this out of my house, I would have customers make appointments to come over and shop. I would actually deliver right to their doorstep if they needed. And I shipped to quite a few places," McDonald

explained.

She mentioned that she had intended to have a bigger digital platform from the start, and while it's still in the pipeline, she had to change the plan in the short-term. Small Town Girl currently has a Facebook page, an Instagram handle, and even a TikTok account. Moreover, she's actively working on getting a website up and running, which she hopes will eventually be a cornerstone of her operation.

"It kind of flip-flopped. I was going to start online, and this just took over.

"My initial goal was to start out online with live sales. And being from such an amazing, supportive small town, people would ask if they could come over and shop. So I was happy to have them, and they would actually shop in my dining room," she stated.

And McDonald was

able to pull it off, but she's still yearning to emphasize live sales more. She felt it was beneficial to showcase more of her inventory digitally because of the sheer number of pieces she currently has in the shop. "I'm primarily a women's clothing boutique, size-inclusive. So I try to carry all the sizes I can. Primarily that's from small to 3X+. I also have lots of accessories. I am hopeful to eventually be able to offer some men's items, but currently, all my graphic T's and sweat-shirts are unisex."

That's one of the boons of Small Town Girl; there's almost something for everyone — despite the name. Men can shop there as is with McDonald's batch of unisex clothing, but she's looking to add more male-specific apparel in the future. In fact, the boutique owner stated that on several occasions, men have stopped by and inquired about the more masculine options. "I do get asked about men's stuff all the time..."

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Laci McDonald added that while she loves having an enormous stock of clothing, the biggest problem has been finding space for the entire inventory.

home while they watch scary movies or an outfit for their bridal shower or some important milestone in their life. It means the world to me.”

But maybe more than any other response, McDonald was emphatically and excitedly proud of her journey, vision, and dream.

“You always think about something and dream about it, and you have a picture in your head. Sometimes when it finally comes, it’s like ‘wow.’”

“Better” was the word McDonald used. Bringing Small Town Girl to life has not only met her expectations, but she emphasized that it’s been “better” than she could’ve imagined. “It, as I always say, still completely exceeds my expectations, and I’ve been here over a year now.”

a lot more than I expected to... They’ll come in and hang out and ask where the men’s stuff is.”

At one point, McDonald showed off one of the aforementioned unisex sweatshirts hanging on the racks, brandishing a “Thankful” mantra, which serendipitously represented McDonald’s mentality toward being a small-business owner.

She tries to pay it forward, especially to other businesswomen, by giving them information on upcoming events or offering her life experience as guidance. “I love to help in any way I can,” she stated.

While McDonald didn’t necessarily create the clothing or jewelry, she wanted to find big and little pieces that fit her branding — and would help another small business. “All those little touches were really important to me,” she continued.

Practicing gratitude was something Laci McDonald was not shy to admit — and she wasn’t ashamed to share the fears that came with the venture, either. “I was terrified when opening a storefront. I felt I wouldn’t do it justice, to be a part of the downtown community with

all the other fellow ladies that I know and respect who also do something similar — if not the same — with their own business.”

Despite the terror of opening a physical location, McDonald was also excited to find herself in the good company of other business owners in the downtown area.

“Thanks to, really, all the love and support from everybody, it took off a lot faster than we anticipated, which I am so grateful for. I mean, we didn’t think it would happen that quickly.”

When asked about

her inspirations for the storefront, she said that the business was always her dream. “I’ve always wanted to do this. I’ve always loved clothing. One of my biggest inspirations was being a plus-size girl; a lot of times, it can be hard to find stuff in all sizes, so that was really important to me: to be able to offer as many sizes as I could.”

In one way, shape, or form, McDonald is working all the time, “24/7,” as she stated. That grind doesn’t deter her ambitions, though. “Answering emails, ordering clothing, talking to vendors, or getting supplies, it is a lot of

work, but I honestly feel because I’m so passionate and love it, I love it.”

Small Town Girl is McDonald’s passion. She proudly admitted as much.

“Nothing makes me happier than when somebody loves their clothes. And when they actually entrust me to be a part of that, whether it’s their favorite comfy oversized sweatshirt to wear at

Small Town Girl is located at 704 Washington Avenue in Iowa Falls and can be reached via 641-640-1562 or shopsmall-towngirl@yahoo.com.

The Times Citizen’s theme for its 2022 Working Women section is “Women Bosses.” When informed on the motif, McDonald was all-in on this year’s theme: “Yes, I love that. I always say ‘boss babes.’” ■

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Agri-Pro started in family's basement

PHOTOS AND STORY BY ELAINE LORING
eloring@iafalls.com

Lari Rabe has been involved in her family's business Agri-Pro Enterprises of Iowa, Inc. (APE) since it was in its infant stages, starting in the basement of her parents' home. She was in high school at the time and helped out when she could.

Her parents, Bob and Dorothy Vosloh, began Agri-Pro in 1979 importing and selling French-made water proportioners. More than 40 years later, Rabe is now in charge, running the business and buying and selling products from all over the world.

"I was working and running the company with mom and dad, so it was just natural that I buy them out," she said. In 2011 Rabe and her husband, Joe, made the transaction, and Lari became the boss of Agri-Pro, her husband choosing to concentrate on his farming operations. They bought the building at 15 Sarah Ave. - the old Boyt building - at the same time.

"When we bought it, we made some changes and diversified the company, and we sell to the industrial and automotive industries now," Rabe said.

Today Agri-Pro deals in animal health products, horticulture products,



Australian businessman Matthew Phillips, right, attended a recent trade show with Agri-Pro owner Lari Rabe, and she is helping to market his products.

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The large warehouse at Agri-Pro Enterprises is behind the main office at 15 Sarah Ave., and owner Lari Rabe knows where practically every item is located.

and turnover that is hurting corporate America today. Our employees are the key, and they do a fantastic job, and we work well together as a team.”

Rabe has 16 employees at the office and her salespeople will also bundle a lot of products together for people to order. The Agri-Pro warehouse is attached to their building and is chock full of items – some they produce, and others they sell. Their main buyers are stores like Theisen’s and Grainger who resale to the consumer. “That’s the nice thing about small companies,” she said. “We make all the decisions.”

Items are manufactured in locations including the United States, Australia, England, Germany, Mexico, Poland and China. The export items all over the world, even to Saudi Arabia.

Rabe graduated from Ellsworth Community College with a two-year degree in art prior to getting married and jumping into her family’s business. “I started helping with my family right away.”

“It’s been a good thing, and I wanted to keep a good thing going,” she said. “My mom and dad gave us good roots, and we’ve had steady growth every year since 2011. When you own it, you can put even more blood and sweat into it, and we work with really good people.” ■

auto, industrial, and marine products. They also handle industrial cleaning equipment and marine detailing products.

“We are basically a marketing company,” she said. “We market and sell to distributors.”

Some of the items they sell include syringes and applicators on the animal health side, “And the big thing through Covid was bio-security items,” she said. “Like masks and coveralls and all that.”

Currently Rabe works with people all around the world and has recently returned from a trade show in Madison, Wis., at

the World Dairy Expo with Australian visitor and customer Matthew Phillips, who owns Prodigy Instruments. On the table in her break room was a stack of leads she had gathered from the Expo. Rabe attends several trade shows during the year where she markets and shows her products.

“We had a very good show,” she said, motioning to the leads. “And these are the notes from each company and what their requirements are to make an applicator.”

Phillips’ company manufactures applicators and several were

displayed on the break room table. “This one we haven’t done yet,” Rabe said of Phillips’ product. “But we’re suggesting it. We do a lot of drenchers and pour-on guns,” Rabe added. “We make a lot of those for pharmaceutical companies, and we also sell them on the retail side.”

“The good thing about

animals is that they can’t self-medicate,” Phillips said of his product, noting that his grandfather was the first to make a modern drenching gun – a repeater syringe – in the 1930s. He supplies Rabe with products to market.

“Our job is to build a brand recognition and marketing,” Rabe said. “Now when we go to

shows people know and recognize (Phillips’) Prodigy brand.”

Rabe said APE brand has become recognizable everywhere, as well. “The key thing I want to say is we have the same people who have a lot of years of knowledge, the same employees... same salespeople that people call. We aren’t having that change

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Putting customers first

PHOTO AND STORY BY BECKY SCHIPPER news@iafalls.com

Readers come in all forms and for Deb King of King's Hometown Furniture and Flooring, it's been a 25-year journey, leading her business to success, and her four daughters to success in the fields of their choice.

In 1997 she took over ownership of the local flooring and furniture store from Bud Rasmussen after working for him part time. While it was less likely for a female to be a business owner at that time, it wasn't unusual. Still, for the small community of Ackley, it was something different.

Prior to owning the store, King ran a small business out of her and husband, Mike's home. There, she made hand-sewn country dolls, rabbits, and cats and selling them at wholesale across the country.

King received a degree in Fashion and Textiles at Hawkeye Institute of Technology (now Hawkeye Community College) and has used her knowledge in her business.

"The first couple years I had lots to learn," she began. She quickly realized



Deb King of King's Hometown Furniture and Flooring took over the business ownership in 1997.

quality and stand behind what I sell," King said. "It's not like metro-area stores that will never see their customer again."

The pandemic made it difficult for small businesses like King's Hometown Furniture and Flooring to receive orders, King explains that some customers have waited up to a year for their orders. As time progresses, ordering has gotten back to normal, though there are items that won't be seen for a long time – for example, the popular glider rockers.

As her 25th year in business comes to a close, she's looking forward to slowing down. From having two to three employees, she's on her own at the store now. She relishes being her own boss and having time to put into making many of the accessories she sells.

"I make all the gnomes, many of the table runners and placemats, as well as doing my own floral designs," King says. Its one of the ways she meets the demands of her customers while saving dollars ordering in the large allotments which are often required of suppliers.

Some items, like beds, have been discontinued due to the difficulty of getting them delivered to her customers, though flooring – carpets, carpet tiles, vinyl, and vinyl plank are still moving strong.

As she heads into the next decade of store ownership, King says she will continue to make choices which are best for her customers. Without them, she can't succeed. Making the right choices, finding the balance between long hours and customer satisfaction, she will endure. ■

A DIFFERENT KIND OF LEADER

the importance of keeping her products on point without being trendy. She relies on her experience and interactions with her customers, leading them to pieces which will fit their home, personality, and outlast the fast-paced changes which are taking place in interior design while not becoming outdated.

Her husband, Mike, supported her decision to purchase the business and often worked as her 'delivery guy' – still does. Together they've raised four daughters – Lyndee, Korin, Maggie, and Eryn. They were, for the most part, raised in the family-oriented store. Today, the couple's grandchildren often visit the store, the girls and their spouses help with furniture delivery and provide their own insight on to what might make it to the floor for customers to

purchase.

Korin eventually joined the business, opening a custom window treatment business based on her own interior design background. She recently moved her business to Iowa Falls. A lifetime of learning from her mother, coupled with her own instincts and training, led to her business which compliments her mothers'.

Lyndee took the leadership learned from her mother, choosing to follow a successful path to a career in marketing.

Maggie is a prominent local photographer. Deb King says that Maggie's love of Ackley came naturally. She spent her youth being a 'town kid' though the family actually lived on a farm north of the community.

The youngest, Eryn, was just 18 months old

when Deb King purchased the store. She's pursued a career in hotel management, working remotely for a major chain.

All four point to the hard work and lessons learned from their mom for their own successful pursuits. They base their community involvement on King's leadership into that realm as well.

From the beginning, she joined the Ackley Chamber of Commerce, and supports the organization today through taking part in the ventures they sponsor.

Over the years, King has relied upon her instinct and training to add home accessories, art, florals, seasonal décor, and gifts to the lines she carries. Additionally, she's learned to personalize furnishings for her customers.

"When I first started,

there wasn't any worry about if a chair, for example, would fit a person," King began. "Today, the realization is that one size furniture, doesn't fit all body types, is a detail that I use each and every day."

Along with furniture sizing to an individual, King leads her customers to find furniture which will fit their homes.

"A three-piece sectional might not look large on the floor, but when it arrives in your home, it can end up being much larger than you might image," King explained. It's her job to aid in finding the pieces which will fit in a home, and she does her best to provide customers what they need while focusing on quality construction at affordable prices.

"I see my customers each and every day on the street. I have to provide

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SECTION B

2023



**A spotlight on
some of the strong
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in the Greenbelt area

Dagel enters third year as Hy-Vee store manager

PHOTO AND STORY BY MARISSA VANWINGEN
mvanwingen@iafalls.com

At 16-years-old, Stephanie Dagel started at the Norfolk, Neb., Hy-Vee as a bagger. By the time she was 18, she was full-time. Steadily, she moved up the ladder before becoming the store manager in Iowa Falls in 2020.

"I never thought about working for anyone else," Dagel said. "When it comes to all the benefits, where most people don't like their job every day and don't like going to work, I've always liked going to work and I love people."

A Norfolk native, Dagel started working and then had her first child at 18. She was also going to college and got her associates degree in business from Northeast Community College. Her husband, Brett, went to school to be in radiology and got a job at Creighton University in Omaha. They moved there and she got a job at that Hy-Vee store as an assistant manager.

Her boss said she should take the store manager path and she started at Hy-Vee University. Through that, she had to go through each



Stephanie Dagel has worked her way up through the Hy-Vee ranks. She started at a store in Nebraska at 16-years-old and is currently the manager at the Iowa Falls location.

A HELPFUL SMILE

department and answer questions and go through an in-depth interview process with each supervisor. She got almost all the way through when she got pregnant with her daughter. At that time, she had a 9-year-old and an

infant at home and it was not the right time to do it all.

After having someone tell her that the best way to become a store manager is to go to different stores, the Dagel family moved to the Sioux Falls store and

lived in Parker, S.D. While there, one of her friends asked if she would help a friend at the Atlantic store.

"That's where my career took a big turn," Dagel said. "I'd always just done my job because I love people, people just seem to like working for me. I just always fit in very well no matter what store I'm at, and I got to Atlantic and somebody was like 'why aren't you a store manager?'"

She went through Master of Retail Operations training and trained in Clarinda. She started that in May of 2019. Just six months later she was doing a corporate interview and on Feb. 15, 2020, was on her way to Iowa Falls. The worst part was, the Dagel family had to live



When Stephanie Dagel moved to Iowa Falls it was just before the start of the pandemic in 2020. The worst part was, she had to live apart from her family for several months.

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In her second year as the Hy-Vee store manager in Iowa Falls, Stephanie Dagele enjoys “playing grocery store.” It’s also a priority for her - and her employees - to be able to make it to any family event going on. She believes that nobody should miss an event because of work.

apart because of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. She would work and go be with her husband and three kids on Friday afternoon, stay on Saturday and then go back to Iowa Falls on Sunday.

“It was 143 days of pure chaos,” said Dagele. “We couldn’t move them here because you didn’t know if school would ever happen again. We had to find a house here. It was probably the worst/best time ever to become a store manager.”

While those months

were extremely stressful, Dagele realized she was there for a reason.

“When I came here, I think, Hy-Vee puts you in places they think you belong but you’re not really quite sure why. After a few months of being here, I figured out why I was supposed to be here. They were lacking the morale, it was not where it needed to be. I don’t think the employees liked coming to work,” she said. “They see Hy-Vee differently because of, not just because of me

but because of the energy. I’m never up in my office, I love being on the floor.”

Her competitive nature has driven her through every step of her life.

“I just love making every day better than yesterday, I always say that. If you have a bad day, like we all do, I just look at work as a way to get up and start over again. Every day is just different,” Dagele said. “That’s something I’ve instilled in my employees, I’m not a big list giver. We’re a

team and we’re going to finish it somehow, somehow. Whatever we need to do today, we’re going to get it all done. So I think that kind of motivates me in a way. If yesterday was bad, today can’t be bad so I have to get up and make it better.”

Dagele’s day starts between 4:30-5 a.m. She gets up and tries to get a workout in every single day at her in-home gym. She then goes into the store at about 6:30 or 7 a.m. Depending on what is going on that day, she

may leave to go to volleyball, basketball or track.

“I tell my people on Monday’s meeting, ‘I’m going to be here every day this week, so if you need something, don’t worry. My door is open, it means I’m here. If my door is closed, I’m gone.’ They kind of know that,” she said. “I just play grocery store. I always say that, I love to play grocery store. They always talk about the next level. I’m a store manager, but there’s a district store director where he runs like three or four stores they oversee. Right now, I don’t think I want to do that. I really like playing grocery store.”

One of the big things for Dagele and her crew is she believes that nobody should miss anything for their family. If their kid has a game, they can go. With a senior in high school and an eighth grader, she is running all over to all of their events and she doesn’t miss a thing, and she doesn’t expect her employees to either.

“We do spend more time at work than we do at home some weeks, so, if you don’t treat them like they are your family, they are never going to work well or do anything for you,” said Dagele. “How many people volunteer to give away free food on a Friday night. I have eight people that are willing to do that because they have a vested interest in not just Hy-Vee, but I think Steph Dagele as a whole.”

Her family is extremely important. Her oldest son just re-enlisted in the Air Force and is stationed at Eglin Air Force Base

in Florida. Her daughters, Jazz is senior and Carlea is an eighth grader. Her husband Brett works at Iowa Specialty Hospitals in Clarion as an administrator and just got his doctorate in Hospital administration.

Iowa Falls has become the perfect fit for the Dagele family.

“I always knew I wanted to run a small store and I knew that it would be, especially being my first store after working for Hy-Vee for 20-some years, to run a small store because I knew how easily I could connect with people and I could make that connection right away,” Dagele said.

While the community and store are smaller and it is hard to grow sales, her goal is to keep the store profitable and maintain customer service. Customer needs and wants have changed, including the addition of shelf-checkout lines and online services, but Hy-Vee remains the same.

“Hy-Vee has been around for a long time, so I feel like it will be around for another 130 years. It’s not like we’re not going anywhere, it’s just going to be harder to recruit and retain a lot of people. The fact that we give back so much to the community I think helps as well,” said Dagele. “People feel vested in Hy-Vee just because of all the extra things we do.” ■

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We celebrate each other's successes and big moments. Over the years I have been with the company we have faced some big challenges and pulled together to work through them. It is during those times you can see what a strong team we are."

Goodknight is a 1993 graduate of Iowa Falls High School. From there, she got her AA from Ellsworth Community College in office automation with an emphasis on medical transcription. She had her daughter, Rachel, the June after she graduated from ECC.

Throughout her 17 years at Times Citizen Communications, Carie Goodknight has had plenty of different roles. Her latest is the Chief Operating Officer (COO).

Goodknight makes moves at TCC

PHOTOS AND STORY BY MARISSA VANWINGEN
mvanwingen@iafalls.com

With family being a central theme in Carie Goodknight's life, it's no wonder she has stayed with Times Citizen Communications for 17 years and continues to move up the company ladder. "Times Citizen has always felt like a family," said Goodknight. "They have been there and supported me and given me the opportunity to grow in my education, career and in life.

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Carie Goodnight, an Iowa Falls High School graduate and native, is all about family. That is why she has enjoyed working for Times Citizen Communications since 2005 - it is a small, locally owned business that has always felt like a family.

2007 she was promoted to manager of administrative services. In 2013, she was named Chief Financial Officer and earlier this year, the Chief Operating Officer (COO).

"I'm proud to be a part of the executive team and get to work with the amazing staff that we have here and move the TCC into the future," said Goodnight.

She loves to learn and went back to school while working for TCC to get a degree in accounting. If she wasn't at TCC, Goodnight sees herself in financial planning and teaching kids about money.

Times Citizen Communications is a mainstay in Hardin County and has been a family-owned business for generations. It started out in 1865 as the Hardin Sentinel. The Iowa Falls Citizen began publishing in 1883. In 1948, Carl Hamilton bought controlling interest, became managing editor and purchased the Alden Times - creating the Times Citizen. In 1983 his son, Mark, purchased the paper and is still the owner.

TCC has grown over the years and in 1995 bought the Spokesman Press in Grundy Center. In 1998, it bought the Ackley World Journal and in 2000 bought the radio station KIFG.

"It's very family-oriented. I love the idea that we're small, locally owned and what we do is important," Goodnight said. "I think it's an important service and I'm proud to say that we're still privately owned."

A lot of her day is working on cash flow management, budgeting, financial analysis, looking forward, looking for new jobs, new revenue sources, expense savings

TCC Cont'd ▶ B12

She also started at Boyt at the front desk and doing general administration work that same year. When the plant closed, Goodnight was a dislocated worker and received money to go back to school. She got her BA from Buena Vista University in business management.

With a young child at home, Goodnight was able to go to class two nights a week and finish as a non-traditional student.

That was the first time that she really fell



in love with numbers and accounting. After graduating

from BVU, Goodnight got her first accounting job at Heartland Pork

as an accounting clerk in 1999. She had three different positions for

the Alden-based company - accounting clerk, accounting/hog records and then accountant. They sold and closed the office and in November of 2004 she got a job at Murphy Brown LLC in Ames as a human resources specialist.

Goodnight worked there for a year until she started at the Times Citizen in September of 2005.

While working for TCC, Goodnight has been in several different positions. Starting as an accountant and then in



Front row: Dianne Haywood, Alexis Bradshaw, Renee Dolash, Shari Keninger, Chandra Luse, Kathy Balavanz, Krista Weber

Middle row: Natalie Cooley, Amber Roskens, Kim Lindsey, Janele Fish, Deanne Robinson, Meghan Lloyd, Jamie Rotgers

Back row: Audrey DeVilder, Emily Nehring, Pam McDonald, Christie Pence, Chalette de Neui, Melissa Harvey

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Michelle Gritsch does more than keep the buffet line full, she also makes sure there's food to prepare, napkins on the table, clean spaces to eat and bills to pay as co-owner of the Iowa Falls Pizza Ranch.

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LEADING COMES NATURALLY

Gritsch grows into boss' role

PHOTOS AND STORY BY COREY MEINTS
cmeints@iafalls.com

Michelle Gritsch basically married into her experience with Pizza Ranch. Now as a part owner, the New Hampton native has no problem with that.

"We moved to Iowa Falls from New Hampton in January 2001 because my husband, Dave, accepted the position of general manager of the Iowa Falls Pizza Ranch," Gritsch said. "While being the general manager at Pizza Ranch, my husband was able to buy 10 percent of the restaurant. Eventually, the previous owner offered to sell us the rest of the business. And, on June 1, 2011, we became the full owners and operators of the Iowa Falls Pizza Ranch."

Prior to that, however, Gritsch held other leadership roles. She helped lead students as an aide in the New Hampton Community School District. Once in Iowa Falls, she led her



From being a teacher's aide and a mom to running a daycare and buying into Pizza Ranch with her husband David, Michelle Gritsch has learned to work with people and keep things running smoothly. She said the last couple years have made being a boss hard, but customers and employees have made it better.

own kids for a while as a stay-at-home mom before going back to work.

"I re-entered the

workforce as the director of Christian Edu-Care Preschool for two years and then went to work

as an administrative assistant for the Mid Iowa Group Thrivent office in Iowa Falls," Gritsch said.

I worked there for five years and then my husband and I bought Pizza Ranch and I left to help

run our business." Gritsch said owning a restaurant had been her husband's dream for as long she has known him.

"I have been along for the ride and there to help him achieve his dream any way I can," Gritsch said. "Dave worked for pizza places in high school, college and early in our marriage. He took a break and worked in sales and plumbing for a while, until joining Pizza Ranch in April 1999."

Through being an owner, and married to your business partner, Gritsch said a lot of things prepared her for her advanced role in the business. Especially her time at Christian EduCare.

"Being the director of Christian-EduCare, I was the administrator that oversaw the budget, payroll, state requirements, three teachers, the daily operations of the preschool and reported to the board of directors, to name a few of my duties," Gritsch said. "That job required me to wear a lot of different hats. I had a wide range of responsibilities to balance, which is very similar to my job at Pizza Ranch."

Gritsch said she feels she is a good leader because she like has always enjoyed the people wherever she worked. Beyond that, she has a keen sense of how to treat them.

"I guess you could

GRITSCH Cont'd ▶ B12

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Lancaster thrives in multiple roles

PHOTOS AND STORY BY JUSTIN ITES ites@iafalls.com

Teresa Lancaster describes herself as a “worker bee” but at every stop along her professional journey, she has always desired to have a strong sense of security.

The Nevada native’s ability to gravitate toward jobs that she believes are unique, have helped guide her toward her current roles as a co-owner of the Timbukbru Brewery, as well as her job as the Director of Building and Zoning for the city of Iowa Falls.

“I like to think that my work ethic was ingrained in me by my mother when I was young. She set a great example for me,” Lancaster said.

When she was a young girl, Lancaster’s mother was employed as a cook at the Story County care facility. That business aided anyone with disability or mental health issues. While the facility was 2-3 miles out of town, Lancaster recalls visiting the building every day when she was not in school. She would frequently talk to the residents even though some could not speak. Having those talks paved the way for her ability to have a conversation with anyone.

During her teenage years, Lancaster attended college at DMACC (Ankeny), but her time there was shortened because she found employment with North Central Human Services - now known as Mosaic - where she helped individuals with developmental disabilities. Her fondness for that job meant that she didn’t stick with the college route.

“It’s not like our family had a lot of money. Nobody stopped me from going to school or really



Teresa Lancaster has found a good balance for her roles as co-owner of Timbukbru and director of building and zoning for the City of Iowa Falls.

EMPOWERING OTHERS

encourage me to do it either. Had they, who knows what I would have ended up doing. Having a sense of security was important

to our family, so we just worked,” Lancaster said. After departing NC Human Services, Lancaster found employment with

Pella Windows at their Story City plant location. Her primary job was to stack wood. Following three weeks at that job,

Lancaster said she was already wanted more out of the experience. She stayed with the company for nearly 10 years and

rose in the company to serve as the first female molder operator.

“There was some reactions to that for sure. How can she do this? She must be making mistakes. That type of reaction really drove me at that time,” Lancaster said.

Her Pella Windows stint provided her the avenue to meet her future husband and Timbukbru co-owner Willie Lancaster. From the moment the couple began getting to know each other, Lancaster said it was apparent that Willie carried an entrepreneur mindset.

“He wanted to own a business in the future and that scared me at the time, because again, I like having that sense of security,” Lancaster said. “We ended up getting into the rental business, and Willie started his own handyman business.”

“The couple moved to Jewell and started those business paths. Once Pella Windows closed its Story City location, Lancaster started commuting to Clarion, where she earned a job working for Hagie Manufacturing. She made that commute for five years before the couple moved to Clarion.

Within the first week after moving to Clarion,



The Working Women of Iowa Falls State Bank

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Not Pictured: Jamie Jackson



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Building a successful brewery from the ground up has been rewarding for Teresa Lancaster and her husband Willie. The Iowa Falls location has experienced a steady climb in popularity and business.

someone approached Lancaster about the possibility of joining the Clarion Chamber Board. They also took over rental inspections for the city as well.

Eventually, John Deere purchased 51 percent of Hagie Manufacturing, and Lancaster said her joy towards that job started to fade.

"They are corporate entity and they are one of top five brands in the world. Hagie Manufacturing did things differently and were focused on relationships and culture. Those two worlds did not mix or align," Lancaster said.

Brewing up a new calling

The origins of Timbukbru started following conversations by six friends who wanted to be innovators. While working for Hagie Manufacturing, Lancaster shared an office with Alan Hagie. One day, the good friends walked across the street to a vacant property that he owned. At that point, Lancaster said she tried to sell him on a vision.

"I thought, here are some abandoned buildings. What if we turned them into a clubhouse where you can invite people you like. Willie could get the plumbing going and I will decorate it," Lancaster recalled. "It was something we could do and no one would tell us we couldn't think outside of the box." After Willie got on board, Lancaster said the vision started to take shape.

"One of guys we worked with brewed beer, we said 'why don't you brew here?' There's plenty of room," Lancaster said.

Following more conversations, it was decided they could build a brand that's above and beyond beer while paying the bills by selling a product created from scratch.

The first Timbukbru opened in Clarion during July of 2018, and the Lancasters learned the ins and outs of the brewery business.

"You learn as you go. We knew nothing about brewing beer, licensing, buildings, etc," she said.

At the beginning of 2019, the Lancasters decided to take a bigger leap by building a second brewery on their own. After researching various locations, they saw a fit in Iowa Falls. They pur-



Making a positive impact on people's lives is one of the reasons the director of building and zoning position appealed to Teresa Lancaster. She handles permits and inspections while making sure citizens/businesses are building to code.

chased the building at 819 Washington Ave. and started extensive renovations to the structure.

"In September of 2019, Willie and I formed a company and started looking at locations. The

draw to Iowa Falls was the community, because I spent a lot of time here as a kid and it just had a lot

to offer," Lancaster said. "Just the excitement of doing this second brewery being on our own was a great feeling."

The arrival of COVID put a big challenge in front of them just as the Iowa Falls business was taking flight.

"I remember the first seven days we were open, we were packed. The newness wears off a bit, but then on Thanksgiving Eve, we had 10 people all night. That was a sign because Thanksgiving Eve is traditionally one of the biggest nights for bars and brewery places," Lancaster said. "We made the decision at that point to close for a month before we opened back up."

Timbukbru's business has steadily moved in the right direction since that one-month closure, and the Lancasters both like to hear feedback on what they are doing correctly,

or what customers would like to see offered.

Many say the atmosphere is second to none, and the customer service is top notch. Known for getting people out of their comfort zone, a karaoke machine has made all the difference in the world.

"You would not believe how that silly piece of equipment (points to karaoke machine) has changed people. Some used to be afraid to sing in front of people, and now they do it all the time. Here at Timbukbru, the feeling of achieving something as simple as getting up in front of people and getting out of your comfort zone ... that's doing something that matters," Lancaster said.

Back in the zone

During the month of July, Lancaster added more to her plate, as she was hired as the Director of Building and Zoning for the City of Iowa Falls. Balancing roles at city hall and Timbukbru took a bit getting used to, but she has enjoyed the role.

Her primary functions include handling permits and inspections, while making sure people are building to code. While many use the term 'code enforcement', Lancaster chooses to refer to the task as 'code empowerment.'

"I love having an impact in people's lives. Going out and building relationships with property owners in community and transforming the way they think about things. Their involvement in the community is so rewarding," Lancaster said. "Change is hard for people but the reception I've gotten from the community is they appreciate what I'm doing. You would be surprised how many people do not know I'm affiliated with Timbukbru. I like it that way. I want them to just know me as Teresa no matter where I am." ■

Karen Hoelscher(44), Sheree Silvey(28)



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Jessica Schipper helps to promote Ackley by being a part of the many boards and organizations the town has to offer.

Schipper more than personal banker

PHOTO AND STORY BY BECKY SCHIPPER news@iafalls.com

Professionally, Jessica Schipper is a personal banker. She assists customers with their banking and financial needs, assisting in opening accounts, taking out loans, and investing in bank products like certificates of deposit, money market accounts and more in her position at Green Belt Bank and Trust in Ackley.

Her role includes working with the public and her position relies less on her education, more on her reputation in the community that she lives and works in.

She provides leadership in her position, though her most visible leadership roles in her community come in the form of promoting Ackley through her responsibilities on the Prairie Bridges Park Board, the Ackley Chamber of Commerce,

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Left to right: Teresa Oelmann, Dina Tystahl, Heidi Mossman, Lari Rabe, Kim Sharar, Beka Forgy, Stacy Peden, Tami Stalzer

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KATHERINE NEWTON 21 Years	SHALANE TSO 19 Years
CINDY OUDEKERK 19 Years	JUDY VAN LOH 3 Years
MALISSA PEARCE New	KATHLEEN VAN LOH 2 Years
MAKAYLA PETERSON 1 Year	ANITA VANBUSKIRK 3 Years
TERRY PEYTON 42 Years	SHAYLEE VANDENBERG New
LORI POMMREHN 1 Year	ALEXANDRA VAUGHN 14 Years
MARY POTKONAK 23 Years	ALYSSA VIETH 4 Years
DEANA RAISCH New	JULIE WALKER 1 Year
TEAH RAISCH New	MORGAN WALKER 6 Years
TRACY RAISCH 9 Years	SUSAN WANKEN 1 Year
KENNEDY REHM New	SHELLY WARNECKE 14 Years
FRAN REIGHARD 3 Years	ROSE WARRINGTON 4 Years
ARDITH RENKEN 3 Years	SAMANTHA WEISS 11 Years
MONICA RIDOUT New	KATHLEEN WHEELER 4 Years
CASEY ROBISON 8 Years	KIMBERLY WHEELER New
DONNETTE ROBISON 10 Years	RHONDA WOOD 13 Years
ALLISON SCHELLING New	

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and roles she has, over the years, taken on in her church and the local Dollars for Scholars Program. She was the face behind Hardin County Relay for Life for many years as well.

In 2006 at the age of 25, Schipper lost her father, Delmer, to Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Through this loss, the fight against cancer, including the one that took him away from her, became a battle she fought through her work organizing Relay for Life events throughout Hardin County.

Her work there began with a simple request to light luminaries at Relay 2007. From that simple, yet most difficult task, she began working with the organization. She first chaired the luminary committee which led to her becoming the event lead in 2009.

Delmer loved shooting sport clays, which led Schipper to the idea of hosting the Harms 100, a sporting clay event which involved an entire new group of people to help the fight against cancer.

Though Relay and the shoot were near and dear to her heart, she'd become so busy that something needed to be given up. She left her roles in both, knowing that others would step up to run them.

Schipper attributes her love of her community and her many volunteer roles and leadership to her parents. They instilled her with a passion to give back to the community she calls home. Her love of Prairie Bridges Park was pro-



Jessica Schipper has a deep love for Ackley and a passion to give back to the community. She works for Green Belt Bank as a Personal Banker, but is involved in many groups and organizations throughout Ackley and feels the key to success is to motivate and include others.

vided through the passion of her high school English teacher, who led students in picking seeds on the prairie in order to expand it. The class also hosted a 5K race to raise funds for the park.

In 2014, Schipper was recruited to sit on the park board, something she continues to find both challenging and

fun. Though she is not the lead on the board, she takes pride in what the group has accomplished since she became a part.

In the past nine years, the board has focused on improving Ackley's biggest asset by increasing the number of camp sites, improving and upgrading electrical

and water services for campers.

Other changes at the park are the recent bridge replacements. Three of the park bridges were replaced with new structures to cross the ponds along the many roadways and trails throughout. Three new playgrounds have been added, along with a gaga pit, sand-

box and volleyball court. To make the park more accessible for those with physical disabilities, concrete was added at the shelter house.

The board, led by Mike Fistler, has provided much focus on the future of the park beyond the bridges the park is named for. New aeration, planting of countless trees,

adding memorial gardens and hosting events which improve fundraising for future projects have been implemented.

"Many of the board's ideas for the improvements come from sitting together and brainstorming about what we want to see in the future," Schipper said. "It's impressive how a simple idea can grow into reality with this group."

"The key to success and in leading the community to growth is to find younger people who are willing to take ownership," Schipper explains. "Give them a role. Don't ask them to head what they aren't comfortable with and support them in whatever way they choose to help."

One might think that Jess has little spare time to do more in her community, but they'd be incorrect.

The past two years, she has also led the Ackley Chamber of Commerce and served as co-president of the organization with Betsy Harms prior to that. She and Betsy Harms were instrumental in the creation of the Sauerkraut Days committee, a part of the Chamber which focuses on the annual celebration in Ackley.

"In any group, the key to success is to motivate and include others," Schipper said. "If there's a mission and you include others, you can do big things." ■

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is also a planner that loves to make lists, check things off and make deadlines.

"Due to my previous positions within the company, the financial side of the business is what I am most familiar with and honestly, numbers are my comfort zone," said Goodknight. "What I am most excited about with this role is the opportunity to work directly with every department of Times Citizen Communications. I am currently in the learning phase and have been asking a lot of questions and sitting in on their meetings to gather information on the processes within their department. I look forward to collaborating with the managers to review current processes and procedures, discuss what is working and where we could make improvements."

One of the reasons Goodknight has stayed in Hardin County all these years is because of the sense of community and family. Carie and her husband Jim reside in Alden and their daughter, son-in-law and three grandsons live in Iowa Falls.

"It's a great place to raise your kids and a lot of us know each other, and everybody is looking out for each other and their kids. I'm very proud that my parents went to school here, raised my daughter here and now my grandkids are going to school here," Goodknight said. "And I love that you go to the bank here, they know who you are. You got to the coffee shop, they know who you are." ■



Michelle Gritsch shines as co-owner of the Iowa Falls Pizza Ranch. Her tell-tale smile is persistent as she greets guests at the front counter or delivers a customer's favorite pizza. She said she can smile knowing she and husband David have each other's backs.

► **GRITSCH**
CONTINUED FROM B7

call me a people person," Gritsch said. "I am empathetic to people and their needs, and I am a good listener. I am truly interested in people. All this helps me serve our customers and manage our 20 or so employees successfully."

People are, after all, the best thing about owning a Pizza Ranch. In fact, the people are her favorite part.

"I love making customers happy and getting to share, in some small way, life with them," Gritsch said. "I love watching our young employees grow and mature. We are often their first job, and watching them blossom and gain self-confidence is so rewarding."

The company itself makes it easy for her to enjoy the business, Gritsch noted.

"Pizza Ranch is a great company to partner with and I can't say enough good things about them," Gritsch said. "They truly live out the Pizza Ranch vision statement of 'To glorify God by positively impacting the world.' I'm not sure how we would have weathered the pandemic without their support and hard work."

Gritsch said her role at Pizza Ranch has evolved. While she is more involved as an owner, she still said her job is to help Dave.

"Primarily I am there to help Dave in whatever way he needs in order for our business to thrive," Gritsch said. "Our personalities and skill sets complement each other. Basically, he's in the kitchen I'm in the dining room. He's the cook I'm the cleaner. The hardest part of working at Pizza Ranch has been defining what my role is. Dave has been successful in this business for

decades before I joined the business."

She added that partnering at Pizza Ranch is not much different from partnering at home. The good and the bad parts come out at both, but it makes their relationship stronger in a lot of ways.

"Dave and I actually work well together, but I may have asked - or dared - him to fire me once or twice in the last 11 years and he has probably on occasion wished he had taken me up on that," Gritsch said. "As you can imagine owning a family business that is open seven days a week, 362 days a year, there really is no way to separate business and home. What we strive for is balance, which is sometimes easier said than done. Working in the restaurant I see firsthand the realities of the business and we know that we have each other's back." ■

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Thanks, Ladies!

Pictured Left to Right: Candy Tjarks, Jean Bonewitz, Cassidy Schlachter, Nikki Wogan, Josie Olson, Jordana Keahey, Amy Gillmore, Kelsey Barnhart, Katera Pfantz
Not Pictured: Marla Sudderberg



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